

## NEW PUBLICATIONS.

**BIOGRAPHY OF EZRA CORNELL.** Founder of Cornell University. A. H. BARNES & CO. No. 322, New York. The author of this work, ex-Governor Cornell, writes in the preface that it may be regarded not so much as a life of his father as a study for such a life. He states that it was prepared originally for private circulation, and that it is given to the public only at the urgent solicitation of friends and mainly for the purpose of placing the facts which it presents in form for safe preservation for future use by other and able pens. But the disclaimer is unnecessarily modest. This filial tribute, although without literary pretension, serves its purpose admirably if the main object of biography be to exhibit with clearness and directness what manner of man its subject essentially was. For no one can rise from a careful perusal of this book without having formed a just and accurate estimate of the beneficent life of Ezra Cornell.

The founder of Cornell University sprang from good old Puritan stock. Both his parents, who were of Quaker descent, could trace their ancestral lines back to the original settlement at Plymouth. His father was in Massachusetts and his mother in Dutchess County, N. Y. The chapter devoted to a sketch of the salient features of their modest history shows that they were strong and sterling characters. Their lines did not fall in pleasant places—they knew the many trials and privations incident to a pioneer life. But they would seem to have met their responsibilities with cheerful courage, generously to have befriended the weak and friendless, and to have trained up their children at all points with intelligent fidelity. Ezra himself first saw the light at Westchester Landing, Westchester County, N. Y., January 11, 1807. And although he will always figure on the roll of our Commonwealth as emphatically a self-made man, nevertheless his biographer indicates that he inherited some notable aids to fortune. His parents transmitted to him an iron constitution for one thing; unbending integrity for another; what may be called a generous nature for a third. Like most of those who patient fate for a great career, he had a passion for knowledge, which circumstances no matter how untoward could not baffle. As an evidence of the intense earnestness with which he embraced every desperate chance of securing an education we are told that "at the age of sixteen, with the sole aid of his brother who was one year his junior, he undertook the chopping and clearing of four acres of heavy beech and maple woodland, ploughing and planting it to corn, as the condition of being permitted to attend school during the winter term. The task was successfully accomplished." It may be noted here that the bent of Mr. Cornell's mind was nothing if not practical. He never was a dreamer, and if he ever saw "visions" no account of them has survived him. His favorite books were not such as nourish the imagination or stimulate the fancy. A treatise on mechanics he devoured with avidity; science in any of its phases had for him an irresistible charm. But the years of his schooling were few and fragmentary, and at the age of eighteen "he sallied forth from the parental roof in quest of business." He soon found what he sought. His first venture was at Syracuse, where he remained two years, getting out timber for shipment by canal to New York City. Then he removed to Homer and gave a year to making wheel-rim machinery. He then passed to Ithaca, and in the first year identified, he spent the first years of his journeymanhood from 1822 until 1841. During that period he engaged in a variety of avocations. He was by turn a carpenter, a builder, a machinist, a millwright, an inventor, a civil engineer and the general manager of large and important business interests. In each of these fields of effort he achieved a large measure of success. He was no Jack-of-all-trades. But such was his native force and sagacity, his aptitude, his industry, that he mastered whatever he undertook. The withdrawal of his employer from business in 1841 left Mr. Cornell with nothing to do. It looked like a misfortune, but it gave him a golden opportunity to improve his circumstances. "For by a curious combination of circumstances," says his biographer, "he was thrown into contact with the men who were just then casting about for the infant telegraph in their keeping, quite at a loss to know how to utilize the grand instrumentality which was destined to revolutionize the social and commercial customs of the entire civilized world." The six chapters that are devoted to detailing Ezra Cornell's part in the origin and development of the telegraph system of this country are among the most interesting in the volume. He had faith in the tremendous enterprise from the first, and showed his faith by unreserved devotion to it with brain and hand and purse. His great monument is, indeed, the University that bears his name, but it will be impossible to perpetuate the story of the rise and progress of the telegraph in America without at the same time keeping his memory green.

The age of fifty found Mr. Cornell, as a result of his extensive telegraph investments, in possession of an ample fortune. Then the man of business blossomed out as a philanthropist in the best sense of that much abused word. First he established a public library at Ithaca for the use of every citizen of Tompkins, the county of his adoption, and afterward, as his income increased and multiplied, he conceived and carried out the noble scheme which added Cornell University to the jewels of the State. More space, relatively speaking, is devoted to the Library than to the University, for the reason, as the ex-Governor explains, that it is believed that the Library was the influence which in a large measure prepared his father's way for his subsequent career. The sketch of both the Library and the University is full of interest. The aggregate of Mr. Cornell's gifts to the University is placed at the magnificent sum of three and a half million dollars. Other chapters of the biography trace of his public life, the patriotic part he played in the civil war, his taste for agricultural pursuits, the railroad and other great enterprises in addition to the telegraph, in which he was engaged, his family and domestic relations, and his personal characteristics.

Over the principal entrance of the beautiful villa which Ezra Cornell was erecting when the last summers reached him are carved the words, "True and Firm." The biographer, with signal propriety, has transferred them to the head of his title page. A true and firm man stands revealed in every one of these pages. The book is a potent incentive to the aims and deeds that make life worth living.

**THE COLLEGIATE SCHOOL, No. 721 Madison Ave., New York.** The principal entrance of the beautiful villa which Ezra Cornell was erecting when the last summers reached him are carved the words, "True and Firm." The biographer, with signal propriety, has transferred them to the head of his title page. A true and firm man stands revealed in every one of these pages. The book is a potent incentive to the aims and deeds that make life worth living.

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